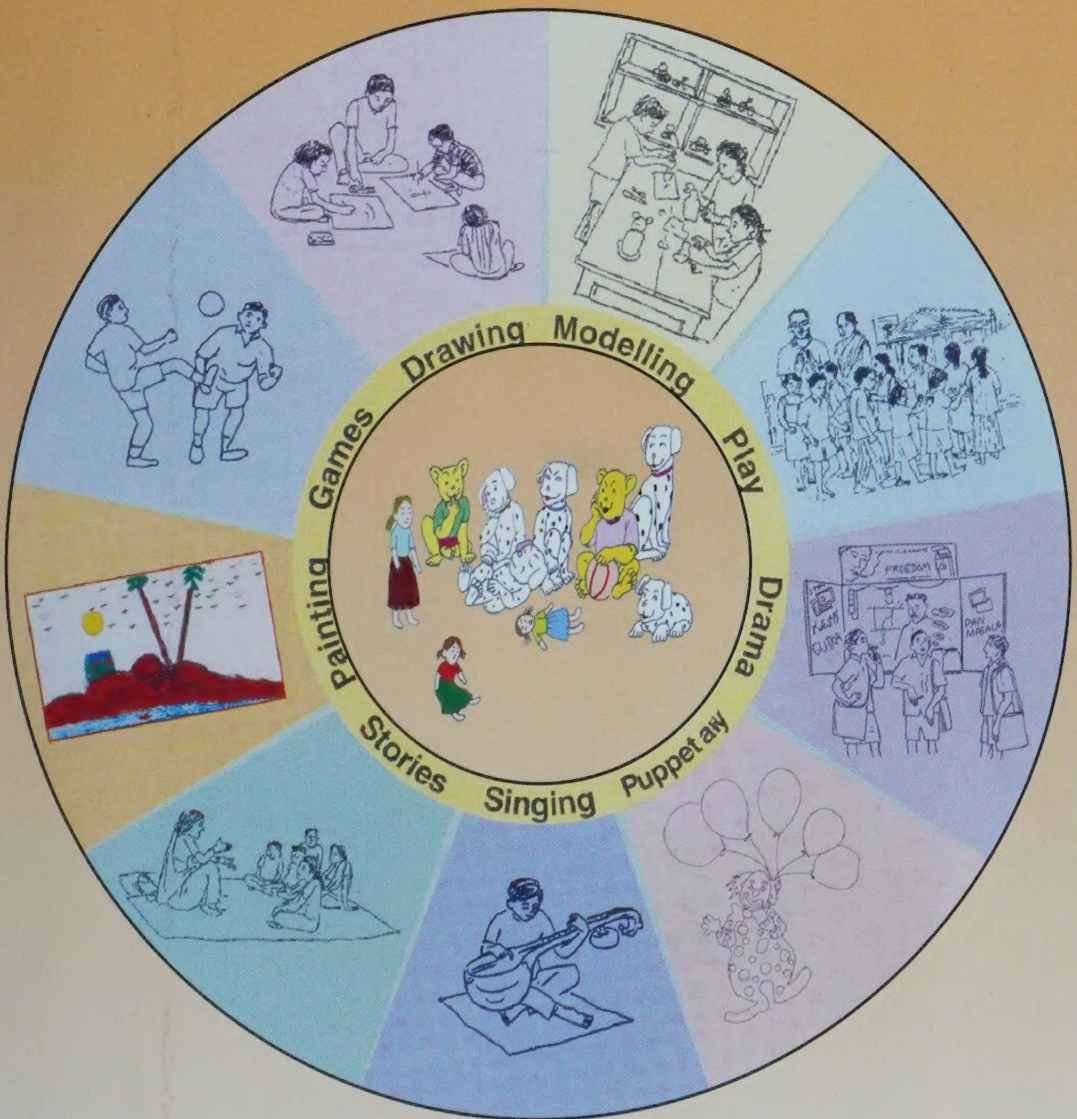


Psychosocial care for children

Medium-Dolls



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FOREWORD

The Indian sub continent is highly prone to natural disasters. Floods, droughts, cyclones and earth quakes are recurrent phenomenon in India. The Tsunami on 26th December 2004 killed at least 300,000 people making it the deadliest disaster recorded in the history.

The Tsunami that affected thousands of lives including that of children was unexpected and sudden, leaving children confused, shocked and frightened. In a moment, their whole world was disrupted. Some children were orphaned, some lost one parent, some lost their siblings, and some had to adjust to a displaced life as they lost their homes. Some of the children are still living in the camps after two and half years with little or no possessions and do not know when they can go back to their places and the adults around them are not in a position to provide much solace or comfort as they themselves are victims of the killer waves. The normal daily routine is disrupted, and often there is no regular school, making it all the more difficult for the children to restore back to normal life.

In order to help the children recover their sense of well being, an attempt to normalize their daily life routines and their emotional reactions is essential. Children need to feel safe and secure both physically and emotionally. It is important that children are given opportunities to express themselves in a safe and accepting environment. These efforts will enable the children to overcome the trauma they have been through and re-establish their sense of well being and good health.

Therefore to enable children to deal with this traumatic event of the Tsunami, NIMHANS, the nodal center for psychosocial care support in disaster in India, provided technical assistance to the Idhaya EC India project in Nagapattinam, Cuddalore, Karaikkal and Kanniyakumari districts of TamilNadu. The child care activity center teachers adopted the medium for working with the children survivors of Tsunami. This played an important role in minimizing the

psychosocial consequences of the disaster. For the normal functioning of children after the Tsunami, they were encouraged not to keep inside the fears but rather to ventilate it out by repeatedly sharing it with others through the use of seven mediums. The psychosocial mediums selected were those the children were comfortable with such as, drawing, dolls, clay modeling, story telling etc. All these mediums were found to be much useful in bringing in mastery over the event and getting back to normalization at the earliest. Further the mediums were play oriented and non threatening for children to ventilate their repressed memories.

The series of seven booklet are intended to enhance practice of psychosocial care for children by helping them reflect on, acknowledge and cope with their feeling following any disaster or with children living in difficult circumstances.

Dr. D. Nagaraja

Director/Vice Chancellor
NIMHANS, Bangalore.

PREFACE

The Tsunami left behind a large number of dead bodies, shattered homes, personal belongings and chaos. Children found it difficult to apprehend what happened to them. The unaddressed questions also left children behind with anger and fear for the sea, cursing, insecurity and helplessness. The safe and nurturing environment for the normal growth and development of the child was destroyed. The impact on children had greater significance as their normal development was interrupted due to the disaster. Need of holistic care was well understood by Every Child and hence psycho social intervention to bring children back to normalcy was adopted with technical inputs from NIMHANS and through the field support from Idhaya Development Society and other partner NGOs. The projects emphasized at healing the minds of children by addressing the psychological needs expressed by them and by rebuilding the social support during the rehabilitation and reconstruction and reconciliation phase to ensure an encouraging atmosphere for their healthy growth and development.

My sincere thanks to Sr. Lilly Lambert, The Secretary, Idhaya Development Society, Tanjavoor for the dedicated effort from herself and her team members in implementing the project in the field area. Sr. Alex and Sr. Ceicily, of IMHSSS-Karaikkal, Mr. Stalin, Mr. Ramesh Babu and all other comrades of DYFI in Nagapattinam. I express my gratitude to Mr. Pushparaj, of VHAK and Mr. Alphonse- of Action Trust for their sincere effort in implementing the program at the field level in Tsunami affected villages of Kanniyakumari. The teachers of the Child Care Activity Centers who skillfully coordinated the activities and made the program a success in remembered greatly at this juncture.

Sr. Mercy, who was instrumental in implementing psychosocial care program for the children affected by Tsunami in Kanniyakumari passed away in a tragic car accident on January 3rd 2007. Her valuable effort will always be remembered.

Psychosocial care team of NIMHANS who trained, guided and supported the team through out endeavor needs special mentioning. I extremely appreciate Dr. Sekar. Professor and Head, Department of Psychiatric Social Work, NIMHANS, Mr. Subashish Bhadra, Mr. C.Jaikumar, Ms.Grace Henry, Mr. Arvind Raj and Mr. Arul Roncalli.

The splendid efforts of Ms.Gayathri Bhadra, who coordinated our back office with her admirable systematic approach that smoothened our work is greatly valued by the entire team.

I sincerely appreciate the contribution and hard work of the authors of this manual who were committed for the great effort of 'healing the minds' of child survivors of Tsunami. Sincere participation of the child survivors, their parents and family members are greatly thanked here with out whom this work would not have been a success. I am sure this book let will be an important tool kit for the professionals working with child survivors of disaster in understanding the relationship of the child with his/her family members so that help from the family members could be taken in providing emotional support to the child in coping with the situation.

G . Sriramappa

Country Director - EveryChild, India.

DOLLS

INTRODUCTION:

Telling stories are as much part of breathing air or as Wright (1995) puts it: “we all need stories for our minds as much as we need food for our bodies...” stories are motivating, rich in language experience and inexpensive. Every human being ‘tell tales’, ‘spin yarns’ or profess the equivalent of Max Bygraves’s ‘I wanna tell you a story’- all of which could be viewed as giving a performance.

Everybody is a storyteller of one kind or another, although often one doesn’t think himself in this way. Friends share anecdotes of everyday living, relatives recall family folklore and everyone reflects upon the past and anticipates the future in words and thoughts shaped as stories.

In terms of therapy, storytelling by therapists might help clients think and behave in new, productive ways. As Ruth Tooze (1959) commented in her early book on storytelling: “...a good story not only meets you at some point of your experience but makes you want to go on from here to there, often equipping you for the going. It may take you on by widening your horizons or lengthening your point of view or deepening your understanding or lifting your spirit”. The use of story telling in therapy is all about ‘equipping people for the going’.

This medium of therapy of story telling session was conducted with children between the age group of 5-15 year old young survivors of the Tsunami with the help of dolls and puppets. Children love stories- to listen to and to tell stories. They can use their imaginations and through the medium of story telling can present their own life incidences to peers and others. Stories can be a strong means of provoking self reflection and change and are profoundly human as Reissman (1993) indicates “Nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do”.

There is a two-fold benefit of storytelling. One is that the child learns to bring together his/her thoughts and present it in a cohesive manner to the group. Second is, by narrating own experience they can get a clarity in their thought as to what incident bothers them. The exercise will also give the facilitators an opportunity to identify children with a need for an in-depth therapeutic intervention.

AIM: To make children play out the family scenes symbolically and ventilate their experiences in disaster using the dolls.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To give a platform to children to share their experiences at the time of the Tsunami and thus ventilate the trauma of the incident.
2. To use dolls as a symbolic of characters involved at the time of the Tsunami while narrating story.

RATIONALE:

Two of the key reasons why children find difficulty in sharing personal experience is because of their 'inhibitions' and 'lack of clarity in thought'. In the exercise for story telling children tell their stories with the help of puppets and dolls. They could come over their inhibitions when they hear the teacher or facilitator share his/her own experiences at the time of the Tsunami. Through the probing of right questions a child's mind could be explored and in return the child will get clarity of own thoughts and feelings. Thus the ventilation of the repressed memories due to the Tsunami through the exercise of 'story telling' will make the child feel better.

PROCESS :

For the exercise split children into smaller groups and provide some dolls to them and give them an incident/situation to tell their experience in the form of story with the help of the dolls. Many a times children forget to tell important events while narrating their stories that

can make a link between their story and life experience. The facilitator needs to be alert and attentive and probe in such a situation by asking the child with important and right questions in order to help him/her in narrating the incidences that s/he forgot to mention.

To make it clear for the children the teacher should start the exercise by narrating his/her story from personal experience. The teacher should encourage all the children to share their experiences. This will not only help children to break away from their 'inhibitions' but also give them the guideline on how to tell stories with the help of the dolls, thereby ventilating repressed memories. Once they get a hang of narrating story by making the dolls move, children would like to talk more about their experiences and this will eventually cause a relief from their repressed trauma that they might not have been able to share before. On seeing other children who are more confident to talk about their experiences, the shy ones can draw motivation to share their own experience.

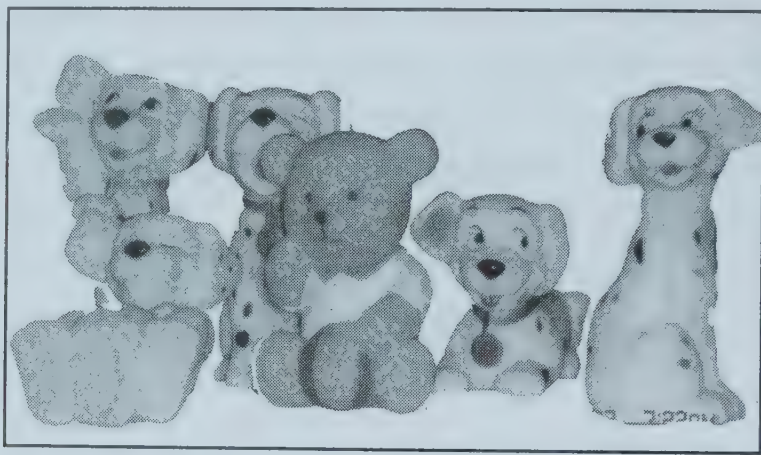
POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- ◆ Do not force any child to come ahead and speak. It is a completely voluntary process for children to share their stories.
- ◆ The facilitator should not interfere or correct a child while sharing his/her stories. They will only facilitate the session and encourage everyone to share their experience with the group
- ◆ Do not try and avoid talking about the event in the belief that it will make a child sad. Children want to talk about what has happened, they have many queries related to the event and they feel better if there is someone to talk to them.
- ◆ The session should be done with small number of children (say 8-10 children) in order to give everyone maximum chance and time to share their experience.

MATERIALS REQUIRED: A stage for children to narrate their stories and dolls of various types.

Stages

The activity is conducted in one phase where children recollect the memories of the events happened in their life during tsunami and symbolically express them using the dolls as various characters in their life. They are facilitated by psychosocial care giver or teachers.



RESPONSES OF CHILDREN

CHILD - 1

“On the day of the Tsunami I was having my breakfast inside the house. My mother had gone to sell tender coconut in the market and father to the paddy field. Suddenly I heard people running and shouting ‘*Kadal Pongi Varuthu*’ (sea level is rising). I came out of the house to see what was happening. It was the most unusual scene I had ever seen before. I could see huge waves at a distance. One of my neighbours saw me standing outside the house and she told me to run for life because water was coming towards our village. I followed the rest of the people from the village. Many people were running with luggage in their head and carried their young children with the other hand. I saw one boy getting injured in the leg while running. All the people from the village took shelter in a Kalyana Mandapam (marriage hall). I was quite worried

about my parents. Luckily both my mother and father also took shelter at the same place.”

CHILD - 2

“We were eating food when grandfather came running to our house and shouted ‘*kadal thani pongi varudu*’ (sea water level is rising). Initially my mother did not believe him and she was confused what to do next. She saw people from the village running. So after a while she came back to her senses and understood that something was terribly going wrong in the village. She put us on the top of the cupboard. She started to cry because father had gone out and we didn’t know where he was. On seeing mother cry, my younger brother also stated crying. I was pretty much scared at that moment not understanding what was happening around me. A neighbor helped us by taking us to the bus that transported us to the nearest camp. We were quite thirsty in the camp but initially there was no drinking water available. We met father in the same camp. Mother stopped crying only after she met father.”

CHILD - 3

“On the 26th of December 2004 morning I had gone to our farm with my grandparents. I have a goat for a pet. So I took it along with me to the field. All of a sudden we saw people running and shouting ‘*odidungo, thani varuthu*’ (run!! Water is coming). Then I realized that something must have happened somewhere. I tied my goat to a tree and ran from there with my grandparents to a safe place. We found my parents at the same relief camp when I reached there with my grandparents. I couldn’t sleep the whole night as I kept thinking about the goat. I told my father about the incident the next morning. He immediately went back to the farm and brought back my goat. I was much relieved on seeing my goat alive.”

CHILD - 4

“On the day of the Tsunami my father was sleeping and mother was giving me a bath when we heard people screaming outside. Initially

we thought it was some street fight but after a while we realized it was something else as water started coming inside our house. Father sent mother, my sister and me in a jeep to the relief camp with other people and he stayed back to rescue some of our belongings. We were quite worried about father and we all cried. Our dog came running after the jeep. That was the last time I saw him. Father came to the camp the next day and we felt much relief on seeing him. I still remember my dog and wish I could save him”.

CHILD - 5

“I saw the killer waves coming towards our house. I couldn’t understand in the beginning what was happening. All I knew was all the people from my neighborhood were running towards a direction. My mother caught my hands and started running in the same direction with others. We lost our house and fishing boat. I still get startled on the slightest sound, like that of an aeroplane flying or the whistle of a pressure cooker. Mother says that I talk in my sleep. I’m so scared that I sleep holding tightly to my parents. I’m scared to go out to play with my friends near the seashore. I’m afraid that the Tsunami may occur again. I keep insisting to my parents that we should shift to the nearby village for safety where my grandmother lives. We still hear rumors about Tsunami. When that happens, we would immediately run to safer places but there would be no food or proper shelter in that place. I hate those cold nights when we ran for our lives.”



CASE STUDY

Name- Radha*

Age- 8 years

During the exercise on 'Doll Family' a young girl of eight years named Radha narrated her story with the help of dolls. She is studying in the third standard in the local school. Her father is a fisherman and mother takes care of the house. She has two sisters and a younger brother.

She reverted back to 26th of December 2004, popularly known as 'Black Sunday' amongst the villages affected by the Tsunami. On the day she and her family were eating breakfast and that's when they heard some noise in the street. As street fights are quite common in their village, they ignored the noise outside and continued eating their food and watching Television. Suddenly water started entering their house. Her mother told her and her sisters to run out of the house. Her mother kept the fishing net on top of the cupboard and ran out of the house with her little brother. Their neighbours also joined them and they all started running towards a direction.

There was a change in expression of Radha as she was recalling the day of the incident of Tsunami while sharing her experience with the group. She continued narrating her story of how she and her family escaped on the day. While running for life with her family, Radha's anklets got struck on the thorn of a plant and she couldn't run. Out of fear and nervousness the young girl started crying. Water was gushing after them so her mother could only shout back at her running to remove her anklets and run. She pulled back all her energy and strength and released herself from the anklets and started

*The names of the children are changed to protect identity.

running again. The young girl was almost going through the fear that she experienced at that time while narrating her story – “the fear for death”. Her friend who was also running along with her fell into a large pit and started to drown. Some adults who were running behind them saw the young girl drowning, rescued her. By the time they reached the bus stop, the first bus had left and the water level had gone up. Young Radha and her family were scared that they are all going to die and just then the second bus came and they managed to get into it. The bus took all of them to the relief camp.

As narrated by Radha, her stay at the camp was not a pleasant one. When they reached the camp they met other people from their village many of whom were known to them. Many of these people had lost their family members while running for life and others were brought to the camp after getting injured. Radha met her other friends in the camp. During her stay in the camp, she never played with her friends, as she was still in a big shock after the incident. Radha and her family went back home after staying in the Relief camp for five days. She shared with the group that she still fears that Tsunami will come again. The people from the village keep spreading rumors that Tsunami is going to happen again.

She started attending ‘Child Care Activity Center’ in her village where various Psychosocial care mediums were used with children who were affected by the Tsunami. She enthusiastically participated in all the activities and this has helped her in overcoming the repressed memories of Tsunami. Now she plays with her friends and moves around though she still feels little scared when she thinks about the Tsunami. According to her parents and school teachers, there has been much development in Radha’s attitude and behaviour after attending the psychosocial care activities.

*The case stories and responses shown are from the field experiences of the Community Level Workers.

Name- Ranga*

Age- 12 years

Ranga, a 12 year old boy, stays in a hamlet with his parents and siblings under a thatched roof. His father used to sell plastic goods and mother is a house wife. He has a brother and a younger sister.

Ranga is a school drop out. He studied till the 4th standard in a Government school. He belongs to a nomadic tribe and keeps moving from place to place all over South India. They don't have a permanent house though after each traveling they come back to a particular village. During the story telling exercise, Ranga also shared with the group that he liked going to school but he had to drop out from school because the school authorities of middle school did not give him admission. This is because he does not have a permanent address or any records to prove that they belonged to a particular place, neither does he has got any birth certificate.

Ranga and his family used to live in a small temporary hut near the sea. At the time of Tsunami, all their belongings got washed away by the water. He and his family members however escaped as they were all out in the market selling plastic goods. But many of his friends and other families belonging to the nomadic community who also lived in huts near the sea got severely affected by the Tsunami. Unlike other people from the village who got relief support from the Government as well as NGOs and companies, Ranga's family and other people from his community did not get any such support because there was no proof of their existence.

Ranga saw the destruction brought about by the Tsunami waves to his people. He occasionally assists his father in selling goods in the market and his mother in household works. He takes his younger siblings to school after which he roams around idle. Ranga very

sadly mentions that his friends started avoiding him because he belongs to the nomadic group. He is upset about this attitude of his friends and also the loss the family had due to the disaster and nobody is there to help him and his family. All these made a tremendous effect on his behaviour making him aggressive and impatient. So much so that he began to pick up fight with his friends because of the illtreatment received from their end.

Ranga found much relief after ventilating his experience and emotions through the various mediums implemented with the young survivors of the Tsunami. At present he is attending classes in an open school started for children from the Nomadic Community. So most of his friends from the school are from the same community. As has been found from his parents and teachers from his school, there has been much change in his behaviour. He takes more responsibility in supporting his family and he is also attending classes on a more regular basis. As observed by the Psychosocial caregivers, Ranga is now much focused in life and doesn't like to roam around idle anymore.

Name- Saravanan*

Age- 10 years

Saravanan is a 10 year old boy studying in the 5th standard. His father is a fisherman and mother takes care of the house and his three brothers. He managed to survive the tsunami waves with his brothers and friends. They took shelter on a terrace building near his house. He witnessed some of the most dreadful scenes of people drowning, animals and houses getting washed away, people screaming and running etc., which left a haunting effect on his young mind. He stayed there on the terrace for a long time fearing that water will come again. Saravanan is a bright student but he is

showing reluctance in going to school for quite sometime now. When his mother insisted him to go to school, he took out rope and threatened her that he would hang himself if she compeled him to go to school. Saravanan's mother was stunned by this behaviour of him.

Saravanan was attending Child Care Activity Center for the young survivors of the Tsunami. The teacher from CCAC, who has been given training on psychosocial care through capacity building program, identified that Saravanan did not like mingling with other children in the center and would often keep quiet when he was asked to share his thoughts with the group. So she decided to meet the mother and came to know that Saravanan has been behaving differently in the recent days and not been going to school. His mother was almost at the verge of tears when she told the teacher that Saravanan threatens her of committing suicide if she insists him to go to school. On further inquiry the teacher found out that Saravanan's behaviour before and after the Tsunami was pretty much usual. He used to get dreams of Tsunami sometimes after the incident but he has not complained of any such nightmares in a long time. He was quite good in academics and was pretty much regular to school.

Saravanan didnt give out anything when the teacher from CCAC and his mother asked him if he is having any difficulty. His mother confessed to the teacher that because of this kind of behaviour showed off by Saravanan. She sometimes gets angry and beats him up.

The teacher reported this issue to a trained person in psychosocial care who made intervention through the psychosocial care mediums. The child was quite cooperative and he drew pictures of Tsunami as he witnessed, wrote about his feelings at the time of Tsunami etc during drawing and writing exercise. On being asked

about his school and studies, however, the child kept quiet. He was hesitant to say anything about his school. So the facilitator used one of the mediums of psychosocial care called “doll family” for intervention through which the child was encouraged to narrate his story.

The child gradually opened up and shared his experience with the trained Psychosocial caregiver with the help of the dolls. He said that once he was playing with his friends and got into a fight with a friend. His friend started hitting him for no fault of his and so he hit him back. His teacher coincidentally came just when he was hitting back the boy and so only he got punished. He told his parents about this incident and that he doesn't want to go to the school anymore because he was punished for no reason and the boy who started the fight never got punished. His father convinced the child that he would talk to the teacher regarding this and so he accompanied his son to the school. His father went to the teacher to talk to him, however, the teacher insulted him in front of his father saying that he was very naughty and disturbed other children in the school. She also added that it was difficult for the school to handle such an unruly child and to take him back. Saravanan was quite embarrassed in front of his father when his teacher complained all these. His expression changed as he was narrating this incident in school during the exercise. There was much anger showed on his face. He further said that once when he was returning home in the evening, some boys from his class teased him. They made fun of him because he got punished by the teacher and told him to hang himself if he had any shame left. Saravanan felt quite bad on hearing this insult from his friends. He came back home and told his parents that he is quitting school and is going to go for a job of watchman in the boat. His face softened down while mentioning his mother on how she sat with him and tried to advise him to study further and take up a job when he grows up. He mentioned some of the most

painful incidences to the facilitator that he didn't want go back to school because his friends would always tease him and so he thought of threatening his mother of killing himself if she forced him to go to school.

The psychosocial care giver met and had a talk with Saravanan's teachers, parents and the child. Both teachers and parents supported in the process and the child could gradually recover from the distress, which otherwise he couldn't explain to anybody. A regular follow up was done and later the child was referred to the child psychiatrist. After four moths of further intervention there could be seen much change in Saravanan's behaviour. He was much embarrassed because of the insult in front of his parents and friends. A timely intervention helped him in ventilating the stressful incident and get over it.

OUTCOME :

The experience shared by the young survivors of the Tsunami at the time of Tsunami could almost transport a listener to the time when it had happened. Children shared some of the very intense moments of their life when they feared death of family members after getting separated at the time of running for life. Some children shared loss of their pets and siblings in the Tsunami waves. Disasters disrupt the life of children in the community in some way or the other. Many children would have lost loved ones whereas others would have lost their homes or their belongings in the tsunami. Even if there has been no personal loss, seeing others suffering around them or hearing about loss from others can be extremely disturbing and distressing to children.

The story telling with the help of toys was one of the most powerful mediums of ventilating the suppressed memories of the traumatic incident. Many of the children's expression during the story session showed that they could still feel the rawness of the incident when they think or talk about it. Suppressing such feelings and memories might have resulted in behavioural disorder in the growing child. This activity of story telling with the help of toys by symbolically representing them as the characters

of own life helped children in ventilating many of the unrevealed experiences. Their facial expression also mirrored the fear and anxiety that children must have gone through at the time of the Tsunami.

CONCLUSION:

Story is one of the paramount ways of understanding the world and individual experiences in it. It is how a human being thinks, makes sense of experience and cultivates imaginations. Through storytelling, artistic responses and experimentation one can explore and develop imaginations and creative abilities in a safe, fun and creative environment.

The activity of story telling not only helped in ventilating the emotions that the children went through at the time of the Tsunami but also in exhaling many of the negative emotions that followed after the disaster such as fear, anger, frustration, tension, insecurities and uncertainty of the future. There came a drastic change in the life of the inhabitants of the villages affected by the Tsunami. Often the turbulence in the head of a child goes unheard or unattended by adults. The activity gave an opportunity to the children to express the fearful incidence as if he/she is telling story of some person whom he/ she knows very well and could feel his/her pain. In addition, the use of toys helped the children to transfer personal issues to the toys and see it from a different and more rationale angle. This made it easier for the children to accept and come to terms with the loss and the situation.

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Psychosocial care for children

Medium-Dolls

Family of dolls is a psychosocial care medium for children where children are encouraged to frame a story of their life using the dolls as characters in their life. The activity helped children to play out the family scenes symbolically and ventilate their experiences in disaster using the dolls. The child brought together his/her thoughts and presents it in a cohesive manner to the group. The facilitator could identify children who need for an in-depth therapeutic intervention. The child could come over the inhibitions of sharing own experiences at the time of the Tsunami. Through the probing of right questions a child's mind could be explored and in return the child will get clarity of own thoughts and feelings. Thus the ventilation of the repressed memories due to the Tsunami through the exercise of 'story telling' will make the child feel better.